

Institute for Public Policy Research



# LOCAL MIGRATION PANEL: CORBY

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## ABOUT THE LOCAL MIGRATION PANEL PROGRAMME

The Local Migration Panel programme was a major initiative launched by IPPR to broker a new consensus in Britain's communities on the future role of migration. Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the project brought together key stakeholders and policymakers in three locations in Britain, to explore the current and potential role of migration in their communities.

The project had a methodology designed to provide local and national policymakers with a deeper and more informed understanding of local people's views on the impact of migration. Through in-depth, deliberative consultation with a panel of local residents, the Local Migration Panel project aims to address the sources of public concern and local areas.

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The authors of the report would like to highlight that it does not necessarily represent the views of those who have supported and given their time and expertise to inform this research. Any errors that remain, and the analysis and conclusions of the report, are the authors' own



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# 1.

## CORBY: A POPULATION-POWERED REINVENTION

Corby is a town in Northamptonshire that has consistently reinvented itself to meet the challenges of each new age. Time and again, the town has met the tests that each new period has presented it with by using people and their skills to power reinvention so that the town can flourish. There has been a settlement in Corby since the eighth century. It was a small, prosperous village from the time of its Royal Charter being granted in 1568 until the rise of the steel industry in the 19th century.

Surrounded by iron ore, Corby's fortunes rose with the Industrial Revolution, as it exploited its natural resources to become a steelmaking town of national, indeed international, significance. By the 1930s, Corby was home to the largest steelworks in Britain. Corby's steel played a crucial role in the Allied advance in Europe during the war, due to the creation in the town of an undersea pipeline to supply forces. The steel tubing produced in Corby was exported around the world. In the 1950s, Corby was designated a New Town, and large amounts of new housing were built to accommodate the workers in the local steelworks. The town grew to supply the booming steelworks with workers.

Corby underwent further transformation as Britain's period of deindustrialisation began. The 1980s brought challenges to Corby. The local economy had been heavily dependent on the steelworks, and so their closure in 1980 led to a traumatic period of high unemployment, economic decline and falling population. Some 10,000 steelworkers lost their jobs – many of whom were the sole or primary breadwinner – along with a further 10,000 in associated industries. Well into the 1990s, around 30 per cent of people in some parts of the town were dependent on unemployment benefits.

Yet it is the 21st century that has arguably seen Corby's greatest reinvention. By the turn of the century, Corby faced a suite of issues that posed significant challenges to the town's long-term prosperity. The labour market, which was still feeling the effects of deindustrialisation, was affected by high unemployment and welfare dependency. The town lacked the infrastructure to accommodate the needs of local people, particularly housing and amenities. There were question marks over whether Corby could attract the investors and employers who would be critical in creating a flourishing economy fit for the era of globalisation that lay ahead.

Local leaders therefore embarked on an ambitious plan to address the town's structural problems, make the most of the town's assets and potential, and to chart a more prosperous course for Corby. This strategic plan, Catalyst Corby, was predicated on significant investment, of around £4 billion, and population growth. As a former industrial town, the Borough of Corby was surrounded by brownfield land and so was well placed to expand, if the demand could be created. The urban regeneration plan intended to significantly regenerate Corby as an attractive town, fit for the 21st century, by diversifying the local economy and jobs market. Plans included redeveloping the town centre, including the £40 million Willow Place, to contain a range of residential, retail, leisure and community uses, including new

civic spaces such as the flagship Corby Cube that opened in 2010. The town was to gain a fully integrated public and private transport system, the centrepiece of which was a new railway station, opened in 2009 and linking the town with London within just over an hour. The town's growth saw the construction of extensive new housing areas, alongside newly developed employment sites to meet modern requirements and attract innovative and technology-based industries.

### **A TOWN THAT WELCOMES NEWCOMERS**

At every stage, Corby's reinvention has been powered by newcomers. The first big wave of newcomers came from the 1930s onwards, when Scots who had worked in the Scottish steelworks moved south to find work in Corby's industry. By 1961, a third of Corby's population had been born in Scotland. As steelworks around Britain closed, particularly in Scotland, increasing numbers of people moved to Corby in search of work. The residue of Scottish influence is still clearly in evidence in the town today, with the Scottish accent recognisable in Corby's streets, and a Highland Gathering held every year. With the designation as a New Town in the 1950s, vast new housing estates encouraged more people to move to the town, even those not employed directly in the steelworks.

In setting up Catalyst Corby, the town again turned to people as the best engine for regeneration. The town's 2003 plan to arrest and reverse the process of deindustrialisation was similarly predicated on population growth. This was an explicit provision of the plan to turn Corby around after the period of post-industrial decline. When the plan was devised, Corby faced demographic challenges: the shape of its demography was becoming unsustainable; it needed key skills for the workforce. The housing stock could not keep up with the high birth rate, but the ageing population overall did not justify the new infrastructure that would be needed. The town decided that population growth was the key to addressing the imbalances in the local labour force and demography, and this became a key element of the plan. The 2003 strategic plan aimed to grow the town from 53,000 residents in 2003 to 100,000 by 2030 – almost doubling its size. The town embarked on a campaign to attract residents to move to Corby from London. With the opening of the new train line, Corby became only one hour from St Pancras. An equivalent travel time on the Tube to South London would take a commuter to Zone 5. Corby's train station put it within the London commuter zone, and much lower house prices made the town an attractive choice. The town even embarked on a tongue-in-cheek advertising campaign to attract commuters, called 'North Londonshire'.

### **GROWING CORBY IN A WAY THAT WORKS FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS**

At the outset of the 2003 plan, the strategic board which designed the growth objectives was conscious that public consent had to be secured. Significant change, especially economic or demographic, can be dislocating. The plan stated that 'clear unequivocal sign-up to the vision by the stakeholders, the people and the agencies that will be at the heart of transforming Corby' was a key component in ensuring success (Catalyst Corby 2003). Accordingly, a range of public consultation events and exercises were undertaken. Over 80 per cent of consultees surveyed were happy with the fast rate of growth set out in the plan.

In particular, the project plan was open with consultees about the role for population growth. The plan reports that 'consultees generally appreciated that more extensive services and facilities were not viable without the present population, and could only realistically be achieved with an increase in population size'. Local residents were aware that Corby was embarking on a high-growth trajectory, and that accordingly they could expect to be joined by new arrivals to the town.

## IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ON POPULATION GROWTH

The plan, to a large extent, has been bearing fruit. By 2016, the town centre had been largely redeveloped, and the railway station had been open for seven years. New housing developments continued to spring up at pace, with the larger developments in their sixth phase of expansion. The motor of this expansion, alongside investment, has been population growth, which was steadily and sustainably rising. By 2010, Corby was the fastest-growing town in England and Wales (BBC News 2010), and by 2016 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) identified the town as the fastest-growing outside London (Northamptonshire Telegraph 2010). In 2016, the town's growth strategy earned a glowing review in *The Guardian*: 'How the town of Corby dusted off the ashes of post-industrial decay',<sup>1</sup> with similarly positive appraisals appearing in *The Economist* and the BBC. By 2016, unemployment, at 4.2 per cent, was a tenth of the level of the 1980s, and 0.5 per cent lower than the UK average. Indeed, by 2016, unemployment was less than half the rate of other post-industrial towns, such as Sunderland.

After a period of stagnating growth, Corby's population increased from 53,000 in 2001 to over 62,000 in 2016. As at several times in its history, Corby has attracted new people to build a new future for the town. During the Industrial Revolution, after its post-war designation as a New Town, and now in the 21st century, Corby has attracted newcomers to help the town confront the challenges of deindustrialisation and set Corby on course to profit from the opportunities of an increasingly globalised economy.

One key distinction between this wave of newcomers to Corby and previous waves is that this has included significant number of migrants from overseas. The increase in international migration Corby has seen has been significant, but it has not been massive, nor has it been particularly unusual for a British population centre in the 21st century. In terms of net international migration, of the 390 local authorities in Britain, 106 have attracted higher net numbers of international migrants.

In many ways, this migration to Corby is to be expected. Migration is increasingly a fact of life, not just in Britain but across the West and around the world. But it is also undeniable that overseas migration can cause significant social changes in an area. Previous IPPR research has found that areas that experience increases in migration from a low base, having had little experience of accommodating large numbers of new arrivals, can find the process more challenging (Griffith and Halej 2015). Having had little international migration previously, this was the case for Corby.

The Catalyst Corby plan was published in 2003. In 2004, 10 countries from central and eastern Europe acceded to the European Union (the A10 countries). Existing EU member states could decide to allow the citizens of the A10 countries full, immediate access to their labour markets, or to impose transitional controls that restricted their access for a number of years. Because the government did not expect large numbers to come to Britain, the UK decided not to apply transitional controls to the free movement of workers coming from these new member states.

While Corby was used to population growth, and had continually seen its population rise since the 19th century, this represents the first significant wave of international migrants to the town. For sure, Corby had always had a small population of a few migrants, but the post-accession increase in significant numbers is of a different order.

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1 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/may/27/corby-northamptonshire-twin-shijiazhuang-china-fastest-growing>

The implications of the changes that Corby has seen merit attention. As the leadership of Corby acknowledged when the town embarked on the growth plan, change on this scale must be managed strategically and command broad consent if it is to be successful. This is all the more so, given Corby did not set out on a plan for high immigration from outside the UK.

We are seeking to bring new evidence and understanding of the role migration plays in Corby, and towns like it, today. Who are these migrants? Where do they come from? What education and skills are they bringing with them; what jobs are they doing; what impact are they having economically? To answer these questions, we present new data analysis that sets out in new detail the role that international migrants are playing in Corby.

To do this, we need to listen to the experience of local people regarding migration. Following the Brexit vote and at the growth plan's halfway point, now is a good moment to take stock of how migration is affecting Corby, and what needs to be done to manage this for the future.

### WHY CORBY ?

Corby is a vanguard among British towns in terms of strategic population growth and linking demographics and economic opportunity.

This report looks at Corby for two reasons. Firstly, because the experience of the town means there is real scope for change. Corby has had migration, not of a very high scale but from a low base. Furthermore, while most local authorities – be they large or small – are usually passive when it comes to trying to shape their demographic future, Corby has been impressively proactive and strategic. We therefore hope our findings will be of interest to a leadership that is actively engaged, innovative and that proactively grapples with the big issues the town faces, and that back in 2003 was seized of the need to ensure that there was public consent for an economic regeneration strategy predicated on population growth.

Secondly, there are lessons to be drawn from Corby for the rest of the country. Every town is unique, with its own history, specificities and people. This is, of course, true of Corby. But the town makes a useful case study for those seeking to understand the role of EU migration, particularly from the 2004 accession countries. Furthermore, Corby does not have a large non-EU or pre-existing migrant community, or indeed many migrants from outside the A10 countries. This means it is a good environment to analyse the impact of EU migrants in isolation.

Finally, Corby is grappling head-on with the issue at the heart of a critical debate in Britain. Is migration required to drive growth? If it was previously, is this still viable in the Brexit era? What is the trade-off between migration and growth, and how do local people conceive of that trade-off? What role is there for public policy in smoothing the tensions migration can cause, in order to facilitate the growth it can bring? These questions are central to Britain's future economic model, which, currently, is far from settled. The lessons from Corby for the rest of the country in squaring this circle, therefore, are instructive.



## 2. MIGRATION IN CORBY: KEY TRENDS

In this chapter, we look in new detail at how Corby's population has changed as a result of EU migration since the turn of the century. Who are these new arrivals to Corby? We set out below the scale of migration to the town, where these migrants come from, their education level, and the jobs they do in Corby. Our findings are based on fresh analysis of ONS data sources. Where appropriate, we have used the North Northamptonshire region rather than the Corby Borough Council region, in order to achieve a sufficient sample size. For the more fine-grained analysis, we have combined together multiple years of the Annual Population Survey to expand our sample.

### MIGRATION FROM THE A10 NEW EU COUNTRIES HAS BEEN A KEY DRIVER OF CORBY'S POST-2004 POPULATION GROWTH

The foreign-born population of the town has grown substantially, more than doubling in size since 2004. Given that Corby did not have a large existing migrant population before then, this is a significant increase. Migration to Corby has contributed to an increase of approximately 7,000 in the town's population size between 2004 and 2016, and foreign-born residents now make up approximately one-fifth of Corby's total population (ONS 2017a).<sup>2</sup>

The vast majority of Corby's migrant population comes from the EU, particularly the post-2004 member states such as Poland. There has been a significant increase in the number of Polish people since the town embarked on its growth plan, from a negligible base. We estimate that in 2016 there was a Polish-born community of around 4,000 in the area, which represents around six per cent of the population (ONS 2017b).

Corby has a slightly bigger proportion of foreign-born residents than the country overall. In 2016, 14 per cent of the population was foreign born across the UK, while it was 18 per cent in Corby. While this is higher than the national average, many towns and cities in Britain have a level that is as high, or higher, than Corby. For example, Coventry and Leicester have 26 and 35 per cent foreign-born residents respectively, and all inner London boroughs have over 30 per cent.

Corby has also seen high levels of domestic inward migration from other parts of the UK. ONS data suggest that, over the period from 2003 to 2016, net domestic migration to Corby has on average been only slightly below the rate of net international migration.

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2 This has been rounded to the nearest 1,000 given the significant margin of error.

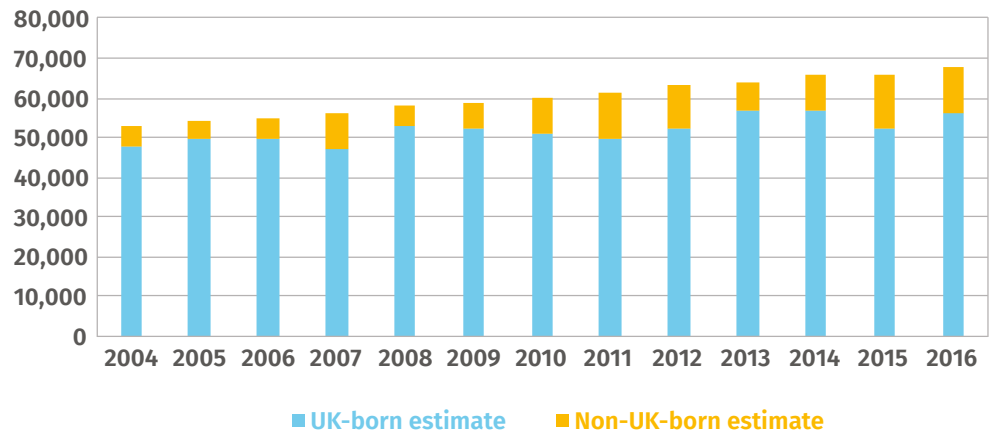
**TABLE 2.1**

Country of birth (most common non-UK countries of birth in Corby)	Estimated population (2016)
Poland	4,000
Lithuania	2,000
Slovakia	2,000

Source: IPPR analysis of ONS data

**FIGURE 2.1**

**Corby population 2005–2016**



Source: IPPR analysis of ONS data

### EU MIGRANTS IN PARTICULAR ARE LIKELY TO BE YOUNG AND WORKING

The most common reason given for originally moving to the UK among migrants in north Northamptonshire is for work. A similar (though slightly smaller) proportion came to join family.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority are of working age – a far greater proportion than the UK-born population. EU migrants are as likely to be in work as the UK-born population.

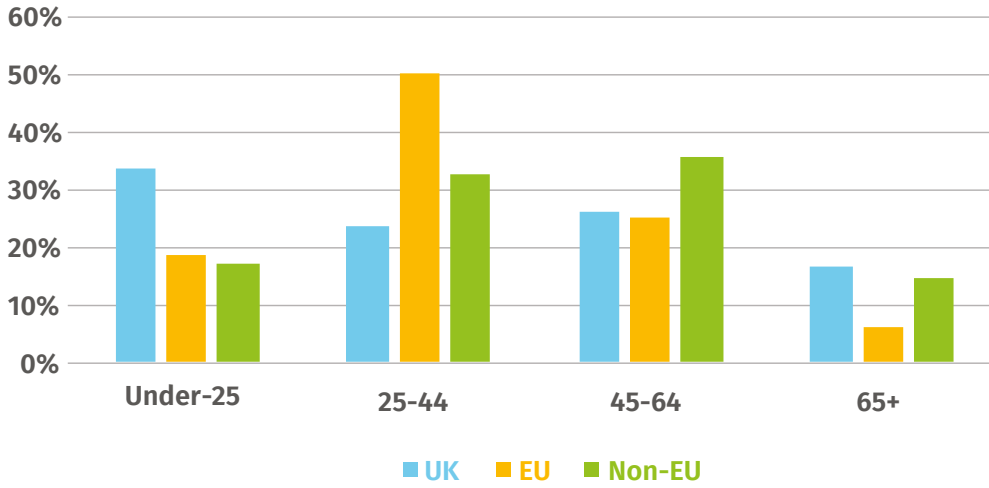
In north Northamptonshire, migrants are less likely than UK-born residents to be aged under 25, and EU-born migrants are less likely to be aged 65 and over. EU women in Corby appear to have more children than their UK-born neighbours, which will partly be due to their being younger. Around 25 per cent of live births in Corby in 2016 were to EU-born mothers, with the vast majority from the post-2004 EU member states.<sup>4</sup> Given that EU-born migrants make up around 15 per cent of the population, this suggests that the birth rate among Corby’s EU-born community is significantly higher than that of their UK born neighbours.

<sup>3</sup> However, it is important to note that significant numbers of these family migrants would have come to the UK as children.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/datasets/parentscountryofbirth>

**FIGURE 2.2**

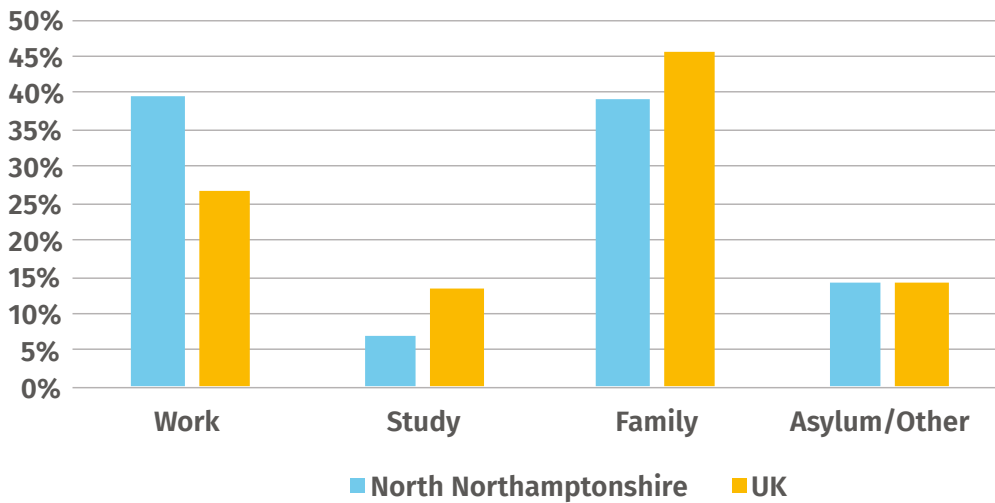
Percentage age distribution in North Northamptonshire of UK, EU and non-EU born



Source: IPPR analysis of ONS data

**FIGURE 2.3**

Reason for foreign-born migrants coming to UK



Source: IPPR analysis of ONS data

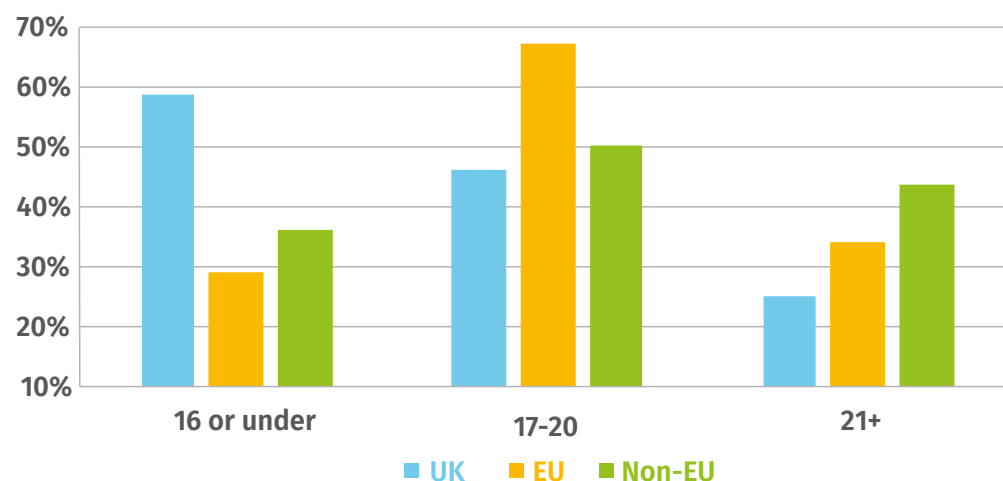
### MIGRANTS ARE BETTER EDUCATED THAN BRITISH PEOPLE, BUT MORE LIKELY TO BE WORKING IN LOW-GRADE OCCUPATIONS

North Northamptonshire's EU migrants are better educated than the UK-born population. They generally stayed in education longer. Eighty per cent of EU migrants left school after the age of 16 – almost 25 per cent stayed in education until 21 or older. Around 50 per cent of UK-born residents left school aged 16 or under.

However, that does not mean they get better jobs: 38 per cent of EU migrants in north Northamptonshire work in low-skilled occupations (compared to 13 per cent of UK-born residents) and 44 per cent of Europeans work in lower-middle skilled occupations (compared to 36 per cent of UK-born residents)

**FIGURE 2.4**

**Age completed education in North Northamptonshire by country of birth**



Source: IPPR analysis of ONS data

The data suggest EU migrants in north Northamptonshire are concentrated in low and lower-middle grade jobs. It is worth noting that the industries in which these migrants are concentrated can be characterised by high numbers of low-quality jobs, agency or gangmaster recruitment, casual or insecure contracts, high staff turnover, and overseas recruitment. A significant proportion – 28 per cent – of EU-born workers in north Northamptonshire work in construction, storage and transport. Given that Corby has undergone significant house-building and redevelopment, it is likely that migrants have been instrumental in the industries that have driven the town’s physical transformation.

This suggests that, for the occupations they are working in, EU migrants are over-qualified compared to their UK colleagues. This could be due to several factors: some sectors may have become reliant on EU labour; recent IPPR research suggests this has happened in the construction sector (Dromey and Morris, 2017). It could also be due to discrimination, with qualified EU workers not able to access employment commensurate with their skill level. Furthermore, it could indicate that the EU migrants in Corby are willing to take up jobs beneath their skill level because they prioritise pay over quality of work and see their situation as temporary.

North Northamptonshire’s EU-born employees’ mean hourly pay is £3.70 less than their UK-born counterparts. Evidence suggests that low-wage migrants are more likely to end up in housing of multiple occupancy or overcrowded and poor-quality housing (Shelter 2008).

There are few non-EU migrants in Corby, particularly compared to the country overall. Non-EU migrants in north Northamptonshire are much more likely to be educated beyond the age of 21 than their UK-born neighbours. They earn a better wage than EU migrants on average, and around half of them work in public services.

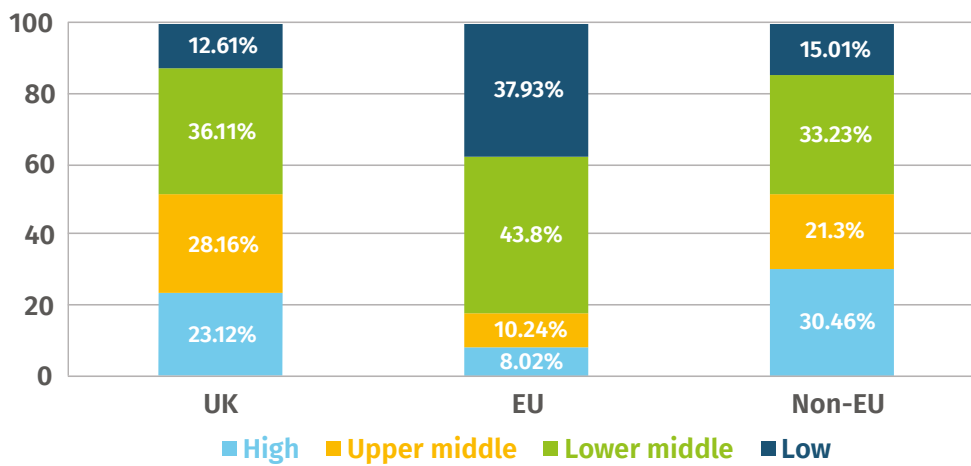
**TABLE 2.2**

	UK	EU	non-EU
Mean hourly pay	£12.10	£8.40	£10.90
Total unweighted observations	1,284	115	66

Source: IPPR analysis of ONS data

**FIGURE 2.5**

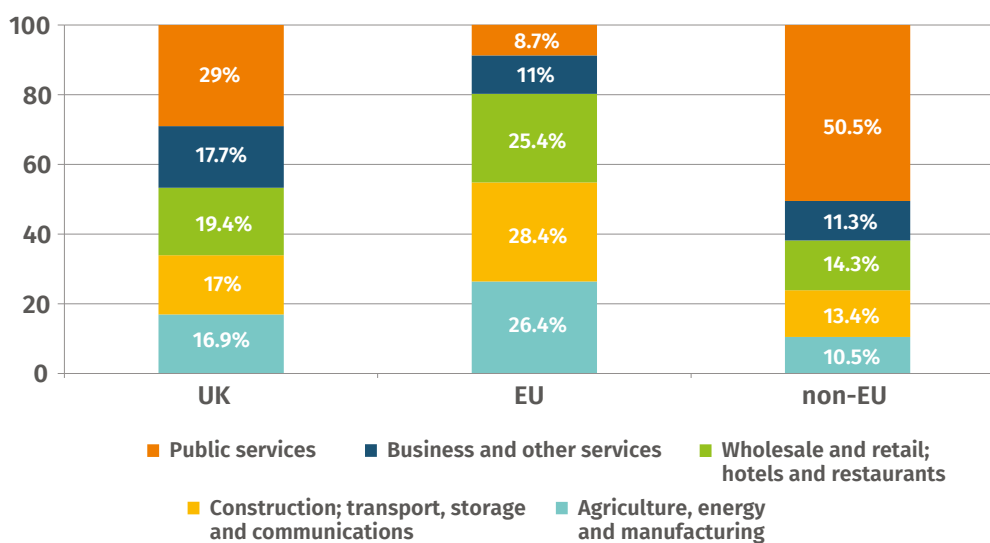
Occupational distribution in north Northamptonshire of UK, EU and non-EU born



Source: IPPR analysis of ONS data

**FIGURE 2.6**

Sectoral distribution in north Northamptonshire of UK, EU and non-EU born



Source: IPPR analysis of ONS data

These data give us a more detailed insight than ever before as to the impact migration has had on Corby. From a very low base 15 years ago, migration has increased significantly. Corby still lies behind the big urban centres where migration is increasingly a fact of life, such as London, Birmingham, Coventry and Leeds. But nonetheless around one-fifth of people living in Corby was born overseas. That is a significant increase on 15 years ago.

This migration has been almost entirely driven by EU free movement. Most migrants in Corby are from the A10 countries. For the most part, they came to work or to join family members who were already here. On the one hand, they are much more likely to have stayed in school after the age of 16 than the average UK-born resident. Conversely, they are much more likely to work in low-skilled or lower-middle skilled jobs. On average they earn less, too, than their British neighbours.

In many ways, it makes sense that many EU migrants have settled in Corby. In 2004, the immigration rules changed for people from the A10 countries. Corby actively wanted to grow its population. The migrants were likely attracted by Britain's low-regulation labour market, strong pound and reputation for openness to immigration compared to other EU countries. There were jobs for them to do, in agriculture, manufacturing and construction, and in service sectors with low barriers to entry, such as wholesale, retail, hotels and restaurants. It is not hard to understand why employers hired them: according to the data, they seem to be willing to work for less money than their British neighbours despite having been in education for longer.

Although migration to Corby has been significant, it has not been of a scale where the town has completely transformed or where public policy would struggle to make a difference. There are no monocultural migrant 'enclaves' in Corby or communities whose integration it is impossible to envisage.

Given the growth Corby has achieved so far thanks to EU migration, the outcome of the EU referendum could put that in jeopardy. This is due to two reasons: firstly, it seems the UK will leave free movement and impose immigration restrictions on EU migration. At the time of writing, there is no clarity on what those restrictions might look like. However, the national debate thus far has focused on imposing restrictions on low-skilled EU migration that fills low-qualification jobs. Our data analysis shows a significant proportion of EU migrants in Corby fall into that category. Therefore, it seems likely that such migration routes will be tightened up in the future. Secondly, Britain has to some extent become a less attractive destination for the type of EU migrants who have come to Corby. In January 2016, the sterling to euro exchange rate was £1 to €1.36. By July 2018 that had fallen to £1 to €1.125. Given the mean hourly pay of an EU migrant in Corby was £3.70 less than a UK national, this depreciation in the value of their earnings could both encourage some to leave and discourage others from coming.

Our research has also shown that EU migrants play an important role in Corby's economy. Like the Scots before them, the European migrants to Corby have proven an important engine of the town's regeneration. The population growth that the infrastructural expansion and jobs market diversification was predicated on, was to a significant extent driven by EU migrants. Many of Corby's key sectors employ EU migrants, particularly those sectors that are associated with low wages: construction, distribution, hotels, wholesale and retail. A significant decline in EU migration could present difficulties in those sectors. Not only that, but a combination of a decreasing value of the pound and uncertainty as to EU nationals' future status in the UK might encourage those who have already settled

in Corby to emigrate. That could cause the town's strong progress towards meeting its population growth objective to roll backwards.

In early 2017, we held a deliberative enquiry session with a representative panel of 12 Corby residents, called the Local Migration Panel. The panel was recruited by a commercial recruitment company, and reflected Corby at large in terms of gender and education level. All those we recruited had voted for the UK to leave the EU. The purpose of the panel is not to establish the extent to which migration caused people to vote 'Leave'. Rather, the panel was convened to investigate: what concerns local people associated with migration; what future they saw for migration in their community and local economy, and what practical solutions they think would manage the impact of current and future migration in their community.

Our Local Migration Panel comprised of two sections: a focus group and a deliberative enquiry. In the focus group, we sought to gain greater insight into local people's experience and perceptions of migration in Corby, in the context of the town's growth. These sessions allowed us to explore in more depth the lived reality of local people in a town that has seen significant increases in migration from the EU, as set out in the previous chapter.

The second section was a deliberative enquiry. This type of research is designed to engage members of the public in decision-making in a meaningful way. The purpose is to find out their views and what they would like to change. We also sought to examine, when presented with new evidence or obstacles to implementing a policy, what adaptations they would countenance. While in some ways similar to qualitative research methods, deliberative enquiry provides an opportunity for participants to find out more about a topic, consider relevant evidence and discuss this evidence with other participants before presenting their view. By engaging participants in a long, in-depth conversation, we were able to dig deeper into their views, and find out how participants responded to information and how their views could shift. Its purpose is to shed light on the deliberations, or thought processes, people undergo when confronted with trade-offs. We used this method to examine how local people viewed the trade-off between migration and growth (and, indeed, whether they accepted that there was a trade-off between them). This provides a useful supplement to other existing research into public views on migration, such as focus groups or opinion polling, which provide more of a large-scale snapshot.

### 3.

## FINDINGS FROM THE LOCAL MIGRATION PANEL

#### FINDING 1: LOCAL PEOPLE FELT INCREASED MIGRATION HAD HAPPENED, WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT, AND STRUGGLED TO SEE THE CLEAR VALUE

There was scepticism about population growth for its own sake: participants did not see the logic in growing the town only through having new migrants move in. On the other hand, people were far more likely to accept migration when they could see the concrete benefits to the local economy.

- People most clearly perceived the benefits of migration when they could see tangibly the economic impact in their day-to-day lives. People were more likely to discuss migration in positive terms, and to defend it when others attacked it, when it was framed in terms of tangible benefits to the local economy.
- Firstly, participants clearly understood the rationale for having migrants fill jobs that it was difficult to recruit for, particularly when that work was arduous. The stereotype of the hard-working Eastern European played strongly into this analysis. On the other hand, perceptions around the inter-relation between the welfare system and the migration system also prevailed. Jobs were so low paid that British people would rather be on benefits than take them up, therefore the only viable option was to pay a British person to live on benefits while importing a migrant to do the work. This was seen as unfair and symptomatic of a dysfunctional system.
- Public services, in particular the NHS, also clearly justified migrant labour in participants' minds. Medical and social care skills were seen as clear criteria through which to accept migrants.
- However, there was a concern that using migration to fill labour shortages might ultimately perpetuate a structural problem in the local economy. Migration was perceived as placing pressures on the NHS, and so bringing in new migrants – even to work in the NHS – would exacerbate that, rather than resolve it. Migrants were needed as construction workers to build new houses – but those migrants would require houses themselves, increasing rather than decreasing the demand for migrants. There was a concern among the panel participants that reliance on migration was unstrategic and short-termist.

#### FIGURE 4.1

*"It does help the economy them coming in, if they're working"*

*"They're prepared to do the jobs that our people don't want to do"*

*"They do bring a lot to the country"*

*"No one I know would work on fields"*

*"We bring them over to build houses, then we need more houses for them. What's the point? It doesn't make sense"*

*"Hospitals need it, don't they?"*

*Source: IPPR deliberative panels with local residents*



We also heard from local residents that they felt Corby had struggled to find an identity in the post-industrial age, even though they could perceive the more tangible benefits of the growth plan.

There was also a sense that Corby was still a relatively depressed town, which people with ambition left, particularly for London. The arrival of migrants in Corby gives an opportunity for the town to rebrand itself as somewhere people want to be. By definition, this is the case for a town that is growing its migrant population.

## **FINDING 2: LOCAL PEOPLE FELT EMPLOYERS GET MOST OF THE BENEFITS OF MIGRATION. THEY FELT THIS WAS NOT REDISTRIBUTED FAIRLY TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY TO DEAL WITH THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION**

Panelists clearly felt that the biggest beneficiaries of migration to Corby have been employers. Our data analysis shows that EU migrants have tended to work for lower wages than UK-born residents, in low-skilled jobs, and that they do so even when they have a higher skill level than the UK population. There was also a clear sense from our focus groups that local residents feel employers have been able to benefit from a highly flexible labour market – free movement – without taking the responsibilities seriously. Low pay, precarious employment contracts, recruitment from overseas and employees who do not learn English were all seen as symptomatic of an employer class that allows profit-seeking to outrank the communal benefits of a successful private sector in Corby.

It is also true that, as work is the motor of migration in Corby, so work is also responsible for the social change that migration has brought. It is therefore fair that employers contribute to meeting the social costs. Furthermore, while migrants of course pay taxes, these are largely captured at the national level; there is no recognition in the dispersal of government grants that Corby has undergone significant social change. Towns like Corby would benefit from a mechanism to allow some of the financial benefits of migration to be captured and dispersed at the local level.

### **Local people can be convinced of the benefits of migration, but they are not immediately obvious to them**

Participants could see and appreciate the benefits of the growth plan, but felt that parts of it are dysfunctional – especially the high reliance on cheap migrant labour.

- Local people in Corby are aware of the growth of the town and the regeneration this has brought. The development of new areas, the regeneration of the town centre, new developments like the Cube (a new central civic space), and some newly developed retail areas were proactively remarked upon as improving the lives of residents, the provision of services to local people and the standing of the town generally.
- In general, these were seen as positive developments. Participants noted that it puts Corby on the map, and makes it a more attractive destination. Recent developments were seen as turning the town around. Residents' views of Corby, and particularly its recent growth, were framed in a place-based way, oriented around Corby's location, proximity and access to other areas as a basis for its increasing attractiveness.
- Nevertheless, the migration from overseas that has demonstrably fed this growth was viewed with some concern. To the extent that migration is explicitly linked to growth, there seemed to be a general feeling of dislocation in the face of change, as well as a sense of identities shifting.
- Recent migration appeared likely to unsettle people; even if they can perceive its broader economic benefits, they feel it poses a challenge to an area's cultural identity. With Corby's identity reforming, policy-makers would do well

to give consideration to local people's general perceptions of dislocation in the face of change.

**FIGURE 4.2**

*"They're bringing people in, they're building houses wherever you look"*

*"There has been a lot of expansion [of Corby] which is not necessarily a bad thing but a shame if we do too much as it [Corby] will lose its identity"*

*"Biggest change has been the regeneration of the town... finally, we're getting on with it"*

*"My street has changed a lot in the last three years"*

*Source: IPPR deliberative panels with local residents*

**A clearer link between the benefits of migration and the local community would benefit everyone**

- Action is needed that sends a clear sign that employers who are responsible and understand the implications of a migration-dependent business model are willing to contribute to managing the impacts of that migration. This would help local people feel more secure that the benefits and costs of migration are being fairly distributed, and that they are a beneficiary of migration and not relegated only to passively absorbing its impacts.
- Another beneficiary should be **the Council**, because distributing the financial benefits of migration would bring in the aggregate national level to local authorities and give them much-needed extra resource to fund integration work. And it would help mitigate some of the more deleterious impacts.
- **Migrants themselves** should benefit if the link between migration and the local community were more clearly drawn, firstly through a growing recognition that their contribution is managed and has tangible impacts.
- Finally, if well designed, such a system could be **fair on employers**. The Brexit vote shows that there is little public consent for the existing economic model, particularly one that relies on EU labour. If they are to continue to recruit EU labour, the message to employers has been that they must either stop, or do more to manage its impacts. Some kind of contribution from employers would send a clear message to local residents that the local employer class has listened and reacted.

**FINDING 3: LOCAL PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO TOLERATE CURRENT LEVELS OF MIGRATION, ON THE BASIS THAT THERE ARE CLEAR EXPECTED BEHAVIOURS THAT ARE FAIR AND TREAT ALL RESIDENTS EQUALLY.**

It was clear from our panels that, while local people saw difficulties caused by migration, they were not implacably opposed. Crucially, they were largely generous and understanding in their attitudes to migrants themselves. Their concern was much more around the fairness of the social contract that was being impacted by high levels of immigration. They saw a clear role for the state in regulating that, and ensuring all people - both migrant and indigenous populations - were treated equally.

- If people are to feel comfortable with a growing migrant population, our residents' panel told us that they wanted to be reassured on two fronts. Firstly, that migrants would integrate and follow the basic rules that structure British society. These include speaking English, core principles of fairness, and contribution to the common good through the tax system. Secondly, they want to be reassured that people are not getting a better deal than the one to which they themselves are entitled. This means migrants do not get access to

benefits on a more generous basis than local people, and that they contribute to the system before taking out.

- Corby's migration has been defined by EU free movement. One of the key issues around free movement is that migrants have been subject only to the same rules as UK citizens – so it has been difficult to ask EU migrants to do anything without making it mandatory for all UK citizens. This is likely to change post-Brexit, and there is strong evidence that EU migrants in the UK are anxious about their future status.
- This provides a key moment for a town like Corby. Firstly, there is a window of opportunity to engage with the EU residents who have made Corby their home, but who otherwise have had little engagement with the local authority or any community body. Secondly, it is an opportunity to make these migrants feel at home and welcome, and to offer them a greater understanding of how to integrate into Corby's community. Thirdly, there is an opportunity to show local people, who have struggled to see the benefits of migration, that the town is taking active steps to ensure migrants are making an active contribution.

#### **Concerns about benefits strongly influence how people in Corby view migration:**

- It was striking during our sessions with local residents that the benefits system was the lens through which immigration was seen. Benefits and migration have been strongly linked in the public debate over the past few years in Britain, particularly in the run-up to the EU referendum (Morris 2016). Yet the public debate has in many ways moved on since the referendum, and we found the benefits system to be far less salient in other areas where IPPR has held focus groups than in Corby.
- This tallies with the town's history. Steel production shut down in 1980, bringing with it around 10,000 job losses and increasing the unemployment rate at the time to over 30 per cent.<sup>5</sup> A large proportion of the town's population had to rely on state welfare, although this has declined in recent years (Corby Borough Council, 2017). Nonetheless, it is clear that the legacy of high levels of welfare dependency weighs heavy in Corby, and has become the mechanism with which other social issues are understood. This in turn shapes local people's attitudes to migration.
- The salience of benefits manifests itself in two ways. Firstly, there was a strong resistance to migrants accessing benefits, and working in jobs with such low wages that supplementary in-work benefits would be required. There was particular hostility to perceived unfairness, such as migrants being able to access welfare without first contributing, being able to get higher cash payments than they would in their own country, and being able to send child benefits overseas.
- Employers were viewed as culpable in driving a symbiotic relationship between migration and so-called 'benefits culture', primarily through refusing to pay a living wage. Several participants expressed sympathy for migrants who were exploited by unscrupulous employers, but for whom the low wage was still an attractive offer. The fault was clearly seen to lie with the employers, while the migrant was perceived as acting in a rational way.
- In many ways, the strong benefits lens, and consequently seeing the fault as lying with employers for driving a dysfunctional over-reliance on cheap migrant labour, offers significant scope for a constructive discussion in Corby. This means the local debate on migration can avoid a xenophobic dynamic, of 'outsiders' and 'others': migrants are seen as rational economic actors in a dysfunctional local economy.
- That said, the second category of complaint stemmed from myth and misinformation. For example, we heard that migrants are given mobile phones

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.corby.gov.uk/about-corby>

and cars, that migrants have preferential access to housing, and that migrants get vouchers for clothing and bedding. A perception that migrants are offered a far superior deal than UK-born residents drives a feeling of hostility that they are being unfairly privileged.

**FIGURE 4.3**

*"They come over here and get straight on the benefits"*

*"They shouldn't let them in unless they've got a job and they go to work"*

*"I go into the Jobcentre and I hear them all. They don't speak English yet they get more benefits than I do"*

*"They can send Child Benefit overseas"*

*"The council just says to them, 'Don't worry, we'll pay your rent.' It's not right"*

*"They get free mobile phones!"*

**Source: IPPR deliberative panels with local residents**

Participants felt that the changes caused by increased EU migration had been too swift, and neither strategic nor managed. There was a strong appetite for activist, interventionist policies to more adequately spread the benefits migration brings, and tackle the challenges it poses to the town. Speaking English, and following other local cultural norms, is viewed with high importance by local people.

- Speaking English was seen as an almost non-negotiable prerequisite to migration playing a positive role in Corby's life. Primarily, this was viewed in practical terms: it was an important communication barrier and people felt uncomfortable when they could not communicate with people living around them. This is particularly worth considering given the data suggest a substantial proportion of the eastern European community in Corby work in industries that may not expose them to much English, and therefore could live in Corby for quite a long time without needing to develop beyond basic English. However, it is also worth noting that recent government policy on tackling poor English among migrants has focused on the Asian Muslim community, particularly women, of whom there does not appear to be a large population in Corby, so any government initiatives will likely have little impact in Corby (for example, the Casey Review 2016).
- Secondly, migrants speaking English was perceived in terms of fairness. The narrative that 'political correctness has gone too far' and the sense that the community had been too accommodating of migrants to the detriment of residents had a degree of traction among our panel members, and is a driver of hostility. Language was perceived as a clear marker, and a cultural compromise that should not be made: it was not for each side to learn the other's language; it is for migrants to learn English.
- There was strong anger at employers, who were seen as exploiting the situation to leverage the benefits of cheap labour, and at landlords, who were seen as being responsible for overcrowding. Participants were keen to see significantly stronger enforcement and punishment. Our panel members were very supportive of interventionist policies that would enforce behaviour on employers. For example, in the construction and retail sectors, participants wanted to see greater enforcement of minimum wage checks, tax contributions and self-employment regulations. Their appetite for punitive or aggressive measures against employers who break the rules was high.

- Furthermore, participants were keen to see a greater spread of the benefits of migration. We heard how businesses employed migrants to make greater profits, but those profits were siphoned out of the Corby economy rather than being reinvested or spread around. This contributed to people's sense that they were getting the 'raw end of the deal' when it came to migration.

**FIGURE 4.4**

*"Other cultures are taking over"*

*"One of them lives near me and they're very pleasant people. One of them had a baby, you know, knocked on my door and said, 'Oh we've got our baby now'. They do try and mix in"*

*"[Migrants] can't be offended by what the British want. The fact that they are offended by us. If you don't like us, well, I'm sorry but... off you go to wherever you came from"*

*"It feels as if we have to accommodate them [migrants], not the other way around"*

*"How many of them [migrants working in trade] are paying tax? How many are working cash in hand?"*

*"You can't read the signs in some of the foreign shops"*

*"A lot of them don't know our regulations, so they call themselves a plumber"*

*Source: IPPR deliberative panels with local residents*

# CONCLUSION

Corby's success brings its own challenges. The impacts of migration now need to be managed in order to secure the consent of local people. And given that Corby's success has been in large part thanks to these migrants, action is needed to ensure they stay. Furthermore, such action will ensure the town's growth plan continues to bear fruit into the future. And building a cohesive, harmonious society is a reward in itself.

Our research in Corby shows that this is possible. The concerns local residents raised in our panel sessions regarding migration focused on practical considerations: on the impact migration was having on the labour market, on the identity of the local community, and on the management and strategy behind rapid population growth.

The findings from our Local Migration Panel in Corby show that local people's concerns on migration are not at all motivated by implacable or xenophobic hostility to migration as a concept or to migrants themselves. Rather, they are concerned by the perceived unfairnesses that the situation creates, with those extracting the benefits not sharing them more broadly; with a lack of migrant integration; and with the absence of the state regulating how employers, migrants and the local area adapt to increased migration. The lesson from Corby is that migration can be a useful way to increase population growth and, through that, economic growth. But that this has to happen with the consent of local people and coupled with concrete interventions to address their issues and the integration of new arrivals.

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